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## IMMANUEL

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It will probably be deemed by many a hopeless undertaking to attempt once more to solve the problem of Isa. 7:14. Have not all the possibilities in the interpretation of the passage already been canvassed? Out of the welter of suggestion can one hope to secure a general consensus of opinion? Probably not. Yet there are two considerations which have led me to believe that it is neither unnecessary nor inopportune to reopen the question. The first is the curious fact that criticism, having apparently boxed the compass of exegetical possibilities, has returned in its latest phases, as represented, for example, by Gressmann and Hans Schmidt, to the messianic interpretation. Is this to be the outcome of all the work that has been devoted to this passage? The second consideration is the conviction that not even yet has criticism paid sufficient attention to the demands of the context both literary and historical in which this oracle was spoken. Scholars have continued to pay lip service to the principles of historical exegesis in dealing with this passage, but not one of them, so far as I can see, unless it be Hitzig, has made the attempt to solve the problem by the consistent and rigorous application of data furnished by the context itself.

If the solution here proposed should not commend itself, it is at least to be hoped that the formulation of the problem has gained in precision, and that the correct principles have been laid down, along the lines of which alone the answer to this century-old riddle must be sought. What is here attempted is primarily a study in method. For a detailed grammatical and exegetical justification of all the points involved and a criticism of rival theories a larger acreage of printed matter is necessary than this journal can afford to put at my disposal.

1. *The historical situation.*—The meeting between Isaiah and Ahaz, at the time of which the oracle 7:14 was uttered, is an episode in the Syro-Ephraimitic War. This is clear from the introductory

paragraphs vss. 1-9 and 10-13. The Syro-Ephraimitic War was itself an episode in the great Assyrian drives of Tiglath-pileser IV into the Westland. This is revealed by II Kings, chap. 16, combined with the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser himself. The historical situation outlined in these documents is the fundamental fact in the light of which the Immanuel prophecy must be examined. No explanation which ignores it has any claim to consideration.

2. *The teaching of 7:1-9.*—This paragraph contains an encouragement to Ahaz not to fear the coalition against him of northern Israel under Pekah and Damascus under Rezin. The failure of the coalition is prophesied and the prophecy is expressed unconditionally (vss. 7-9a).<sup>1</sup> Yet immediately afterward a conditional deliverance is implied (vs. 9a). How is this to be explained? It is not to be regarded as a belated qualification of the promise in vss. 7-9, a kind of afterthought. This would contradict all that we know of Isaiah's attitude toward the coalition (cf. chaps. 8 and 17). He saw clearly that it was doomed to failure. Isaiah understood the real menace of Assyria. Verse 9b must accordingly refer to something else. Ahaz will be unconditionally delivered from the Syro-Ephraimitic coalition, but *his subsequent destiny* is conditional. The arbiter of that destiny can only be Assyria. Rescue from the lesser danger of invasion by Rezin and Pekah is unconditional; rescue from the greater danger of invasion by Assyria is conditional. This must be the meaning of vs. 9b in its present connection. And observe that vs. 9b is expressed, not as a promise, but as a threat. Isaiah has reason to fear that Ahaz will prove faithless and that the punishment will come.

3. *The teaching of vss. 18-25.*—The form of these verses, taken as a whole, can scarcely be original. But their general content may be accepted as genuine. Here the destruction by Assyria<sup>2</sup> of a land unnamed is certain. The threat is *unconditioned*. But when vss. 18-25 are subsumed under vs. 17, the land is clearly Judah. This suggests that a crisis has intervened between vss. 1-9 and vss. 17, 18-25. The conditional threat in vs. 9b has become an unconditional

<sup>1</sup> For the reconstruction of vss. 8 f. see the writer's note in *JBL*, XXXV, 140 f.

<sup>2</sup> Even though the references to Assyria by name in vss. 18, 20 are glosses, as I believe they are, there is no reason to question their correctness. There is more reason to suspect the genuineness of the allusion to Egypt, vs. 18.

threat in vss. 17, 18-25. There must be a reason for this change. When we turn to vss. 10-13 we discover the reason.

4. *The teaching of vss. 10-13.*—In considering these verses two questions at once arise: (1) Why did Isaiah feel it necessary to offer a sign to Ahaz? (2) Why did Ahaz refuse the offer? Neither of these questions is answered in the passage.<sup>1</sup> Hence the answers must be conjectured. Along what lines must conjecture proceed if they are to be anything more than guesses? Clearly along the lines of the historical situation.

If the second question be first considered, it is plain that Ahaz did not refuse because he did not wish encouragement. It is equally plain that the reason he gives for his refusal is not the real reason. Isaiah recognizes that it is an evasion. Two facts suggest the real reason for his refusal. The first of these is the historical situation as outlined by vss. 1-9 combined with II Kings, chap. 16. Ahaz and the court were in a panic (vss. 1-9) and applied to Assyria for help (II Kings, chap. 16). Isaiah urged Ahaz not to fear, but to trust in Jahweh (vss. 1-9). How would this agree with an alliance with Assyria? Here we meet with the second fact. Isaiah construed such an alliance as a mark of unbelief, as apostasy from Jahweh, 8:5-8.<sup>2</sup> Hence, if Ahaz was either contemplating an appeal to Assyria or had already made it, we have the right to infer that his refusal of Isaiah's offer of a sign was due to his desire to continue in his pro-Assyrian policy. If he accepted Isaiah's offer he would commit himself to the prophet's policy of reliance upon Jahweh alone. This idealistic policy he did not have the courage to adopt. No other reason for his refusal is so historically sound or adequate. It is now easy to answer the first question. Isaiah offered his sign because he wished to make a last, supreme effort to dissuade the king from the Assyrian alliance, which the prophet construed as religious apostasy. Probably when the offer was made the embassy to Tiglath-pileser had not yet been sent. There was still opportunity

<sup>1</sup> There is a slight gap between vss. 1-9 and 10-13. The various methods taken to bridge over the gap are evidence of the fact of its existence. Possibly there once existed a fuller account of the scene.

<sup>2</sup> In analogous circumstances in the various Assyro-Egyptian crises of 720-701 Isaiah regularly construed reliance upon Egypt in the revolts against Assyria as apostasy (cf. chaps. 20; 28:15 f.; 30:1 ff., 15; 31:1 ff.). Isaiah's politics throughout his career was consistently idealistic. In other words it was governed by religious considerations.

for the king to change his mind. The result of his effort is a failure. Consequently the conditional doom announced in vs. 9a because of lack of faith must become certain doom. Ahaz is rejected, as the wording of vss. 10-13 makes sufficiently clear.<sup>1</sup> We have therefore in vss. 10-13 an explanation of the change from conditional threat in vs. 9a to absolute threat in vss. 18-25, provided these last verses can be understood in the light of vs. 17. We are therefore driven to an examination of vs. 17. But this cannot be done without at the same time considering its relationship to vss. 14-16.

5. *The connection of vs. 17.*—While vs. 17 can be regarded, as it often is, as the theme of which vss. 18-25 are the elaboration, this is not its natural connection. Verse 17 as direct address differs in form from vss. 18-25, in which the direct address is absent. Again vs. 17 is absolutely necessary to vss. 10-13. If vss. 14-16 be for the moment left out of account, vs. 17 is seen to be the complement of vss. 10-13. Because of vss. 10-13 we expect a threat; in vs. 17 we get it. Further, it is the kind of threat we expect, namely, invasion by Assyria. This was the threat implied in vs. 9 if Ahaz did not believe. Ahaz did not believe (vss. 10-13). Therefore the threat implicit in vs. 9b becomes explicit in vs. 17. Thus vs. 17 is connected in a more intimate and organic way with vss. 10-13 than are vss. 18-25. All theories, and there are many, *which seek to explain vss. 14-16 by deleting vs. 17 from the text, must be regarded as historically unsound.* Verses 10-13 and 17 are clear, consistent, and agreeable alike to the preceding context and the historical situation, and vs. 17 is necessary to vss. 10-13. Verses 14-16, on the contrary, are among the most ambiguous verses in the Old Testament. Method requires that we proceed from the clear to the obscure; vss. 10-13 and 17 furnish the framework within which vss. 14-16 must be examined. Nobody would have dreamed of separating vs. 17 from what precedes if it had not been for the supposed demands of vss. 14-16. But even in these verses there is fortunately one absolutely clear statement, namely, vs. 16b.

6. *The meaning of vs. 16b in its present connection.*—This clause has also, along with the rest of the verse, been rejected, but the accuracy

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the disgust at the hypocritical answer of Ahaz expressed at vs. 13 and the subtle but significant change from "thy God," vs. 10, to "my God," vs. 13b.

with which it reflects the historical situation and its agreement with the unconditional promise in vss. 5-9a vouch for its authenticity. But why should the promise in vss. 5-9a be repeated after the king's refusal of Isaiah's offer in vss. 10-13? Granted that the contents of the clause in themselves agree with the general situation, the *present position* of the clause occasions a real difficulty. If this can be solved in a satisfactory way we shall be well on the way to a solution of the sign.

In the first place it is to be observed that since the promise in vss. 5-9a is unconditional it *could* be repeated after the king's expression of unbelief as well as before it. But what is the *motive* of the reiteration? This is the real crux. And here the failure to keep the historical situation in mind is fatal. If this situation is remembered the motive becomes clear. The promise of deliverance from the coalition in vss. 5-9a was originally made in order to dissuade Ahaz from the Assyrian alliance. It was reiterated after the king's decision in order to emphasize how unnecessary that decision was. But by itself vs. 16b would express an incomplete thought. It was not only unnecessary for the king to ally himself with Assyria; it was positively disloyal to Jahweh, and therefore must be punished. This complementary thought is found in vs. 17. The decision of Ahaz is useless, for he would have been saved in any event (vs. 16b); it is madness, for it will bring upon him destruction (vs. 17). Verses 16b and 17 state explicitly and unconditionally what vs. 9b states implicitly and conditionally. The increased precision in statement is due to the fact that the die had been cast (vss. 10-13). This interpretation of the meaning of vss. 16b and 17 in their present position after vss. 10-13 is confirmed by the "therefore" of vs. 14a.

7. *Significance of "therefore," vs. 14a.*—The "therefore" of this clause can only introduce a sign of threatening import. It is uttered in view of the king's rejection of Jahweh. The announcement which it introduces must accordingly be in some way or other an announcement of doom. All interpretations which ignore this inference do violence to the most obvious requirements of the context. The "therefore" of vs. 14a demands vs. 17 (a further argument against the deletion of this verse), and it is not inconsistent with vs. 16b as we have interpreted it. Indeed, if it were not for vss. 14b-16a it

would be possible to take vs. 16*b* itself as the sign and attach it immediately to the "therefore" of vs. 14*a*. The sign would then consist in the fact that the fulfilment of the prediction of deliverance out of the Syrian crisis is a guaranty of the fulfilment of the prediction of destruction in the subsequent Assyrian crisis. Thus construed, vss. 14*a*, 16*b*, and 17 would yield an impressive thought. It is not necessary that the sign in itself should be of an unpleasant character in order to be effective. On the contrary, the stinging mockery of it would be enhanced if the sign seemed to be of happy omen. Verse 16*b*, as a sign in itself propitious, but a pledge at the same time of what is unpropitious, would have just that ironical quality in it which would make it most effective for Isaiah's purpose. "I told you," he must be supposed to say, "that you would be rescued from Syria. *I repeat it*; but now the certainty of that rescue shall be to you the sign of the certainty of your doom." The prophet's irony is a fitting rebuke to the king's hypocrisy.<sup>1</sup> Two objections may be urged against the foregoing interpretation of the relationship between vss. 14*a*, 16*b*, and 17:

1. The first is the asyndeton at vs. 17. It is claimed that if vss. 16*b* and 17 were related in the way suggested this close relationship in thought would be reflected in a syntactical relationship between the verses. There is an admitted difficulty at this point. Two different ways may be suggested by which to solve it: (*a*) The question may fairly be raised whether the asyndeton is original.<sup>1</sup> It is admitted by all scholars that the chapter as a whole presents a decidedly secondary text.<sup>2</sup> May we not conjecture that vs. 16 and 17 were once bound more closely together than they are at present? Is this text-critical conjecture more improbable than the higher-critical deletion either of vs. 16*b* or of vs. 17, the latter of which verses has been found to be absolutely necessary to the thought of the

<sup>1</sup> For the view that the fulfilment of vs. 16 is the guaranty of the fulfilment of vs. 17, cf. especially Hitzig and Porter, *JBL*, 1895, p. 30 f.

<sup>2</sup> For example, vss. 18-23, at least 21-23, can scarcely be in their original form. Verse 1 is borrowed from II Kings 16:5, though adapted to its present position (cf. 6:1). Above all, though chaps. 6, 7, and 8 are clearly intended to go together and to present a connected narrative of the stirring events of the Syro-Ephraimitic War and to interpret their religious significance, yet the literary form of the three chapters differs in a remarkable manner. While chaps. 6 and 8 are written in the first person, chap. 7 is written in the third person. But that chap. 7 was also originally composed in the first person is clear from the expression "my God" which is still preserved in vs. 13*b*.

passage, and the former of which has been seen to contribute very materially to the rhetorical impressiveness of Isaiah's threat? I think not.<sup>1</sup> (b) While the solution of the difficulty may thus be legitimately sought along text-critical lines, it is by no means impossible that the asyndeton was original and intended. It must never be forgotten that we are dealing in this passage primarily, not with what was originally a literary composition, but with a report of an *actual conversation* between Isaiah and Ahaz. The general situation at the time of the conversation was tense in the extreme. Both king and prophet were evidently under a great strain. There was here a violent conflict of wills. The destiny of the nation seemed to both men, though for different reasons, to be hanging in the balance. Is there anything unnatural in the supposition that under such circumstances the words of Isaiah should reflect in a measure the excitement of his mind? Would not the asyndeton be perfectly natural? Would not the excitement of the moment, the hot indignation produced by the king's rejection of his offer, express itself in just this abrupt, unconnected style?<sup>2</sup> Unless the asyndeton is explained in one or the other of the foregoing ways we become at once involved in critical operations upon the text far more drastic and leading to results which are nothing more than guesses and which violate at vital points the demands of the context.

2. The second objection to the preceding interpretation of vss. 14a, 16b, and 17 involves a formal difficulty rather than a real one. It was suggested that vs. 16b might be the sign. Formally of course this is not correct. Verse 16b is introduced by "for" (vs. 16a) and is the explanation of the sign, and not the sign itself. This naturally leads us to the discussion of the sign itself in vs. 14. But before entering upon this vexed question it will be helpful to sum up the results of the investigation thus far attained. The method has been to advance from the circumference of the passage to its center, from

<sup>1</sup> It is interesting to notice that the LXX connects the two verses by ἀλλὰ. I do not claim that this represents an older form of the text. But it is an evidence that the Greek translators felt that the two verses originally belonged together.

<sup>2</sup> This explanation of the asyndeton which commended itself to me in the first studies which I made of this passage many years ago I subsequently abandoned. But if the attempt is made actually to visualize this remarkable scene, I cannot really feel that there is after all anything artificial in the explanation. Chapter 8 clearly reveals the fact that Isaiah is not attempting to give an elaborated literary account of what happened in these strenuous days, but only jottings or notes, as nearly as possible in their original form, of what had been spoken by him. Explanations of what was said are not supplied.



the general historical background of the great Assyrian drive to the special background of the Syro-Ephraimitic War. The various paragraphs and verses of chap. 7 have then been taken up in order, vss. 1-9, 18-25, 10-13, 17, 16*b*, and finally the "therefore" in vs. 14*a*. In the course of the investigation only two conjectures have been made: (a) It was assumed that Isaiah was attempting to dissuade Ahaz by his offer of a sign from the contemplated Assyrian alliance. This assumption is warranted by everything we know about the historical situation and the attitude of Isaiah elsewhere toward such alliances. (b) It was assumed that the admittedly perplexing asyndeton at vs. 17 either is due to a defective text, certainly not a violent assumption in view of the secondary nature of the text in this chapter, or is a reflection of the intense mental excitement of Isaiah at this time, again not a violent conjecture when once the attempt is made to visualize the scene. If these conjectures are admitted, we discover that vss. 10-13, 14*a*, 16*b*, and 17, when taken together, yield in every way a clear sense, a remarkably forcible sense, and one entirely in keeping with the historical situation. This is an immense gain. If the surrounding context is clear and unmistakable in its meaning, the conditions for the interpretation of the sign are provided. The sign must agree with its context or be eliminated. This method of approach to the discussion of vss. 14-16*a* is the only correct method. But the history of interpretation down to our own day and including the latest interpreters (for example, Gressmann, Hans Schmidt, and Skinner in what is generally the very admirable second edition of his commentary on Isaiah in the *Cambridge Bible*) is a standing refutation of that foolish question, What's in a name? The name Immanuel has fairly polarized its context for the great majority of scholars. They seek to interpret the details of the context so as to agree with the assumed implications of the name Immanuel rather than to determine the significance of this name out of the unambiguous data furnished by the context. No interpretation of vss. 14-16*a* which does not come to the discussion of the sign in some such way as above indicated seems to the present writer to have any real claim upon our consideration. Of all passages the present one demands a rigorous adherence to the fundamental principles of the historical method. Otherwise we are left to divination; in other words, to guessing.

8. *The elements in the problem of vss. 14-16a.*—In what follows I propose to adopt the analogy of chemical experimentation. There are certain elements or ingredients in vss. 14-16a. How will these various ingredients combine with what may be called the bases furnished by the context? Will all of them combine with the bases and form a solution, or will only some of them combine? What are the elements that will combine? The answer can only be discovered by experimentation. Introduce the various elements one at a time and watch the results. Now the elements in vss. 14-16a with which we must experiment are: the nature and functions of signs in general, the exact meaning of the word *ʿalmah* ("virgin" or "maid"), the exact force of the article which accompanies *ʿalmah* (generic and indefinite or definite), the personality of *ʿalmah* (who is she?), the time of the conception and birth, the person who names the child (the *ʿalmah* as in the present pointed text, or someone else?), the significance of the name Immanuel, the significance of the diet of butter and honey (does it imply poverty or plenty?), the construction of the ל in the phrase לִדְעָתוֹ (temporal or telic), the significance of refusing the evil and choosing the good (chronological or moral). A full and logical treatment of the problem would require that each one of these ingredients should be studied by itself. But limitations of time and space will prevent this. On the other hand, in such an experiment it is permissible to choose first of all those elements which seem most likely to combine, and watch the results.

9. *On the nature and functions of signs in the Old Testament.*—If we examine the signs in the Old Testament according to their nature we discover an almost endless variety. It is needless to give examples. It is sufficient to observe that they may be equally well either miraculous or non-miraculous. But to be true to their quality as signs they must of course be able to arrest the attention. If we examine them according to their functions they will fall for the most part into a few well-defined groups. (1) There is first of all the great class of clearly memorial signs. These signs remind one of some important deed done, some fact or truth experienced, some relationship established, etc.<sup>1</sup> (2) In the next place there are the clearly

<sup>1</sup> For example, the rainbow, the sabbath, circumcision, dedication of the first-born, the Passover, the stones set up at the Jordan, the censers of Korah, and Aaron's rod that budded (the last a miraculous sign).

confirmatory signs. These are usually given to authenticate the work of some leader or the word of some prophet. Thus the miracles at the Exodus are signs to authenticate the leadership of Moses. Sometimes events of a strictly miraculous nature are accomplished in order to confirm the truth of a prophetic statement. The two classic examples are the miracle of Gideon's fleece (Judg. 6:36 ff.) and the miracle of the sundial of Ahaz (Isa. 38:7-8, 22=II Kings 20:8, 9). It is to be noticed that neither of these cases has any inherent connection with the event of whose accomplishment it is to be a pledge. At times also the confirmatory element lies in the fulfilment of a prediction of an event in the near future; the fulfilment is the sign or pledge that a prediction of an event to occur in the remoter future will also be fulfilled. In such cases the miraculous nature of the sign lies not in the nature of the events predicted but in the fulfilment of the prediction. They testify to the omniscience rather than to the omnipotence of God as that is revealed through the prophet. Sometimes such signs have no inner connection with the event of which they are pledges (cf. I Sam. 10:1-9); sometimes they have such a connection (I Sam. 2:34; Jer. 44:29-39). (3) A third class of signs may be called prophetic signs. These are neither memorial nor confirmatory signs, but are themselves prophecies. They might be called prophetic charades. They are signs in the sense of symbols. Such a sign is found at Isa., chap. 20, where the prophet goes naked and barefoot as a sign of the future captivity of those people who were intriguing against Assyria. In particular, symbolic names are often used as prophetic signs. Compare the names of Hosea's children (Hos., chap. 1).

While signs generally fall under one or the other of the foregoing classes, it is not impossible for a sign to belong occasionally to two classes. For example, it might be both confirmatory and prophetic. A curious instance of such a double function is found at Exod. 3:12. Here God confirms Moses in his belief in his divine mission by telling him that hereafter he would worship God in this very place in which he was now standing. In this case the future fulfilment of a prediction is not a pledge of an event in a still remoter future, but it confirms a present promise. The confirmatory and memorial elements in the sign are thus combined, but in a very singular way. One wonders

just how an event which is to transpire in the future could be a convincing sign to Moses at the present moment. The suspicion at once arises that we are not dealing in this case with any true sign. It must be remembered that the passage was written long after the supposed event which it describes, and it reflects more naturally the knowledge of the later event by the writer than it does an actual scene. This is the only certain example of the kind,<sup>1</sup> and its peculiarity is to be explained by the literary origin of the passage in which it stands. The question now arises, What sort of a sign are we dealing with in Isa. 7:14-15? Is it miraculous or non-miraculous in its nature? Is it a memorial sign, or prophetic, or confirmatory in its function? Commentators have usually spent their energies in discussing the nature of the sign. But the question of its function is a far more important question if we would understand the meaning of the passage. There are three elements in the sign, the conception and birth of the child (vs. 14a), his name, Immanuel (vs. 14b), and the diet of butter and honey (vs. 15). What are the functions of these various elements?

10. *First experiment. Consideration of vs. 14b, the naming of the child.*—Since vs. 16 is introduced as the explanation of the sign and the meaning of vs. 16b is clear, method requires that we should make vs. 16b the starting-point of our investigations. Now vs. 16 is related to the sign as fulfilment to prediction. It further implies that the prediction must have a hopeful note in it. We are therefore led to expect in the sign a prophetic element and a promissory element. If we ask ourselves of which of the three elements in the sign is vs. 16 most likely to be the explanation; in other words, which of the three elements contains most distinctly a prophecy that is at the same time a promise, it will be seen that the birth and conception of the child may, for the moment at least, be ruled out. In itself this does not sound either like a promise or like a threat. It is neutral. Furthermore, as compared with the other two elements, the name and the diet, it is non-symbolic. The name certainly and the diet probably have a certain symbolic meaning in them. We would naturally expect that vs. 16, which is introduced as an

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 37:30=II Kings 19:29 has also been so interpreted, but the interpretation is a doubtful one.

explanation of the sign, would explain one or the other of the symbolic elements in it rather than the non-symbolic element. But of which of the two symbolic elements, the name or the diet, is vs. 16 the explanation? On the one hand, it is connected through the wording of vs. 16*a* with vs. 15. Therefore it might seem reasonable to experiment with the relationship of vs. 16 to vs. 15. On the other hand, the symbolic significance of the diet in vs. 15 is much disputed, whereas the symbolic significance of Immanuel is clear. It stands for promise, for deliverance. From the point of view of method, therefore, it seems appropriate to follow the line of least resistance and connect the promise in the explanation with the undoubted element of promise in the sign; in other words, construe vs. 16*b* as the interpretation of the name Immanuel (vs. 14*b*).

Three considerations greatly favor this view: (1) If vs. 16 is not the explanation of vs. 14, then vs. 14 is left unexplained, a most suspicious circumstance.<sup>1</sup> It will of course be retorted that if vs. 16 is not the interpretation of vs. 15, it too will be left uninterpreted, and is not this an equally suspicious circumstance? It is, only the suspicions lead off in an entirely different direction. In this dilemma, however, it is much safer to connect vs. 16*b* with vs. 14, and avoid the consequence of leaving the name Immanuel unexplained because of the next two considerations. (2) Old Testament analogies suggest that where a symbolic name is given, as in vs. 14, followed by an explanatory clause such as vs. 16, the clause should be regarded as the explanation of the name.<sup>2</sup> (3) But above all the analogy of 8:1-3 almost compels us to hold that vs. 16 is to be regarded as the interpretation of the name in vs. 14. There can be no question that the explanatory verse 8:4 gives the interpretation of the name of Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz. But the explanatory verse 8:4 and the explanatory verse 7:16 *refer to the same event*, namely, the destruction of Judah's enemies Syria and Ephraim. Here we have two references to boys with symbolical names followed in each case by an explanatory clause, and this explanatory clause refers in each case to exactly the

<sup>1</sup> The separation of vs. 16 from vs. 14 is the readiest way to gain room for the interpretation of Immanuel as the Messiah. For if vs. 14 is not interpreted by vs. 16, it is not interpreted at all, and the exegete has then free play to import whatever meaning he pleases into Immanuel.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Gen. 16:11; Ruth 1:20; Gen. 17:5; Hos. 1:4 ff.; I Sam. 4:21.

same event. It would be in the highest degree improbable if, while the explanation in 8:4 is an interpretation of the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz, the *same* interpretation in 7:16 had nothing to do with the name Immanuel. The only difference in the two passages is that the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz explicitly refers only to the destruction of Judah's enemies, whereas the name Immanuel refers explicitly to the rescue of Judah *implied* in the destruction of her enemies.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly the line of least resistance in the interpretation of the sign is to go on the supposition that vs. 16 is the interpretation of vs. 14. The arguments in favor of this view are of the most weighty character. But is there not a serious difficulty in the combination of vs. 16 with vs. 14 in the way just proposed? The sign in the name Immanuel on this view will be formally related only to one element in the context, namely, the promissory element, the deliverance from the Syrian crisis. But this is not the main point which Isaiah had in mind. The main point was the destruction of Ahaz by Assyria, vs. 17. How is this promissory sign to be reconciled with vs. 17? The answer is: In the same way in which the promise in vs. 16*b* is reconciled with vs. 17. If the interpretation of the sign (vs. 16*b*) can be reconciled with the threat (vs. 17), certainly the sign itself (vs. 14*b*), of which vs. 16 is the interpretation, can also be reconciled with the threat. *Verse 14 can only be brought into contradiction with vs. 17 when a larger promise is read into the name Immanuel than the explanation actually given of it in vs. 16*b* warrants.*<sup>2</sup> But why did Isaiah offer a sign which deals with only one of the elements in his announcement, and that the least important? The answer has already been suggested in the

<sup>1</sup> The somewhat less perfect logical correspondence between name and interpretation in 7:14 and 16 as compared with 8:3 and 4 should not be allowed to obscure the real analogy between the two passages. Perfect symmetry might suggest that as Maher-shalal-hash-baz is verbally related to the destruction of the enemy, so Immanuel should be verbally related to the salvation of Judah. The destruction of the enemy in vs. 16 is not a verbal interpretation of the name Immanuel. But this discrepancy between vs. 14 and its explanation in vs. 16 is of no real consequence when the actual situation is kept in mind. What Ahaz was afraid of was the attack of Rezin and Pekah. What Isaiah originally sought to do was to comfort him, not with general promises, but with very specific assurances that he had nothing to fear from these particular kings. When the prophet repeats this assurance at vs. 16 Ahaz would certainly understand that the destruction of his enemies meant deliverance for him at that particular juncture. It is therefore very natural that the name Immanuel, involving a promise for Ahaz, should be explained by a verse which refers explicitly only to the destruction of the king's enemies.

<sup>2</sup> The messianic interpretation thus logically demands the deletion of vs. 17. But the presence of this verse is absolutely demanded by the context.

discussion of vs. 16*b*. His intention in so doing was ironical. He repeats the promise which he had originally made in vss. 5–9, and his sign concerns only this promise, but the promise itself has become, and was intended to become, only a mirage. The fulfilment of the promise was the pledge of ruin. The sign, therefore, which directly guarantees the promise indirectly guarantees the ruin also. Yet the sign itself has no double meaning. It is bona fide. The promise will come true. Ahaz will be delivered in the present emergency. The terrible irony of the passage lies just in the fact that the sign is still formally limited *only to the promise*. Thus the introduction of the name Immanuel into our discussion requires no qualification of the results already obtained. On the contrary, this element combines very naturally with our bases. The propriety of introducing this new element in the way indicated is supported on independent grounds (the probable relationship of vs. 16*b* to vs. 14), and the result strengthens very considerably the rhetorical impressiveness of the passage. But if we adopt the view that vs. 16*b* is the explanation of the name Immanuel in vs. 14*b* as our working hypothesis, several supremely important consequences immediately follow.

1. The name Immanuel is to be regarded as a prophetic, not as a memorial, sign. This is the natural inference from the relationship of vs. 16 to vs. 14. The name Immanuel points forward to the deliverance implied in vs. 16. It is a favorite theory at present that the name is rather a memorial sign, and that when it was given it was in view of the fact that the deliverance had already been experienced (cf. Ichabod, I Sam. 4:21). In other words, while the announcement by Isaiah that the child will be given the name Immanuel is of course a prophecy, the actual naming of the child by the mother is not prophetic of a deliverance still future, but is in memory of a deliverance already experienced. The deliverance follows the announcement of the sign by Isaiah, but precedes, or is contemporary with, the naming of the child by the mother. This view is possible, but it is very improbable. Certainly if vs. 16*a* can be regarded as part of the original prophecy the name must be regarded as given in view of a deliverance yet to be experienced. For the deliverance in vs. 16 does not precede, nor is it contemporary with, the birth of the child, but follows the birth. Otherwise we would expect vs. 16 to be

expressed differently (e.g., before the boy *is born*, the land, etc.). Again the analogy of 8:1-4 strongly suggests that the name is a prophetic, and not a memorial, sign; that is, that it points forward to a deliverance, not only future to the time when Isaiah gave the sign, but also future to the time when the name was bestowed upon the child. The name Maher-shalal-hash-baz unquestionably points forward to a future which was *still* future when the boy received his name. It is reasonable to suppose that the name Immanuel is a prophetic sign in exactly the same way.<sup>1</sup>

2. If vs. 16*b* is the explanation of the name Immanuel (vs. 14*b*), it follows in the next place that the promise in the name has nothing to do with the messianic hope. It is a promise the fulfilment of which is itself a guaranty of ruin. No such promise can be a messianic promise. Accordingly all explanations of the other elements of vs. 14 which play with the idea that a larger hope is contained in the name Immanuel must be abandoned.

3. It follows further that if the promise involved in the name Immanuel ("God with us") is fulfilled in vs. 16, and that fulfilment is a guaranty of subsequent destruction, then no true religious value from Isaiah's point of view can be ascribed to this name. The promise made in the name is made to an unbelieving king; hence the religious conviction expressed in it must be interpreted as a superficial religious conviction analogous to the claim in Amos 5:14.<sup>2</sup>

4. It follows in the fourth place that if the confidence expressed in the name Immanuel is a false religious confidence, neither Isaiah nor any of the Remnant can be included in the "us," as is so often done, and the various attempts to connect the promise in Immanuel with the promise contained in the name Shear-jashub must be given up. But who then is included in the "us"? Naturally the person

<sup>1</sup> To support the memorial theory of the sign Immanuel by Exod. 3:12 is a very doubtful expedient. We have already seen that the sign in this passage is an artificial sign, not a real one. It occurs in a literary composition written long after the event and with a knowledge of the subsequent history. Such a composition offers no safe parallel to a report of an actual historical conversation.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. especially Professor Porter, *JBL*, 1895, p. 26. This view of Professor Porter has not met with the favor which I believe it deserves. I very cheerfully accord to Professor Porter the merit of being the first to recognize the true significance of the name Immanuel in the present connection. I am sure that he will equally welcome the fact that I arrived at the same conclusion before I had read his valuable article, though I am indebted to him for the confirmatory use of Amos 5:14.



talking and those whom that person may represent. But who is the person talking? Who names the child? The significance of the name Immanuel is the first thing to interest us in vs. 14b; the identification of the one who gives the name is the second question of importance in connection with this clause.

5. According to the present vocalized text the person talking is supposed to be the *ʿalmah*. The verb קָרָאת is construed as a third feminine, though the pointing is that of the second feminine. But the second feminine is certainly out of place here as the *ʿalmah* is spoken of in the third person. The third feminine in קָ, though not without analogy, is unusual, far more unusual than is generally supposed.<sup>1</sup> It is therefore not the part of a cautious exegesis to adopt the abnormal form in the present case so readily and as a matter of course as is commonly done. This caution is all the more in order in view of the fact that the versions do not appear to recognize the third feminine at this point. The LXX, Aq., and Sym. read second person, and this is affirmed to be the regular translation by Eusebius, Procopius, and Jerome.<sup>2</sup> The Vulg. reads *vocabitur*, and so also the Syr., while Matt. 1:16 reads the indefinite plural. If the consonantal text alone is considered, the verb is read most naturally as a *second masculine*. Since Ahaz has been the only person addressed in the present scene the interpretation of the verb as a second masculine would seem to be the most natural one. This agrees admirably with the ironical significance already attached to the name Immanuel. Who is guilty of a false and superficial reliance upon Jahweh if not

<sup>1</sup> König, *Lehrgebäude*, II, 420, gives twelve instances outside the present passage of the third fem. in קָ to which may be added Gen. 33:11. Of these, three are certainly corrupt, Exod. 5:16; Ezek. 24:12; 46:17. Two are probably corrupt, Gen. 33:11 (the versions read first person) and Ps. 118:23 (the versions suggest a part. or adj., not the third fem.). Four cases can be just as well regarded as regular fem.—in קָ—written defectively, Lev. 25:21; 26:24; Jer. 13:19; II Kings 9:37. The Keri at II Kings 9:37 itself suggests that this is what has happened. There are left only three passages, Deut. 32:36 (the only case of a strong verb ending in קָ, the other cases being in קָ" or קָ" verbs) and Deut. 31:29 = Jer. 44:23. In these last two instances in which the same phrase occurs we have, curiously enough, the same form as in Isaiah, though coming from a different verb. The form in קָ is of course theoretically possible, actually occurs before suffs., and is recognized by the grammarians (cf. Stade, p. 236; *Ges. Kautzsch*, Sec. 74 R. 1 and 44 R. 4), and Meinhold has probably gone too far in demanding its elimination from the grammars (cf. *Der Heilige Rest*, p. 120). Nevertheless the statistics just given certainly admonish to caution in adopting the form unless it is found to be absolutely necessary to do so.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Holmes and Parsons.

Ahaz? I do not mean to claim that the construction of **קראת** as a second masculine and the identification of the subject with Ahaz are inferences which *necessarily* follow upon the hypothesis that vs. 16 is the interpretation of Immanuel in vs. 14b. Nevertheless they are inferences which naturally suggest themselves when once that hypothesis has been adopted, and they tend to strengthen the hypothesis as well as to receive themselves support from it.<sup>1</sup>

Thus far we have treated only one of the elements in the sign, the name Immanuel (vs. 14b). This was found to be a prophetic sign. But something more than a prophecy must be found in the sign. Isaiah originally offered a sign to Ahaz as a confirmation of his promise of deliverance. When he actually gives the sign we naturally expect it to have the same function which it was originally to have, even though the nature of it need not have been exactly the same as Ahaz would have chosen. This expectation is confirmed by the fact that the promise in vs. 16 is the same promise for which Isaiah originally offered the sign as a guaranty. We are therefore dealing at 7:14 with a prophetic sign that is at the same time confirmatory. To ignore this fact is to ignore one of the prime conditions that must be satisfied by the interpretation of the passage. But when this conclusion is reached a new problem presents itself. In what does the confirmatory element consist? It cannot be in the name of the child. The name is a prophecy and not a guaranty of a prophecy. The mere fact that the child is to bear a certain name is not sufficient to import into the sign such a confirmatory character as the context requires. Now of the two remaining elements in the sign, the conception and birth of the child on the one hand (vs. 14a) and his diet on the other (vs. 15), the first element is much more likely to contain the confirmatory element than the last. The diet of butter and honey, on the face of it at least, is symbolic and would therefore presumably relate itself to the prophetic part of the sign found in the name Immanuel rather than to the confirmatory part. Method suggests, therefore, that we should first of all attempt to find the

<sup>1</sup> The construction of the verb as a third fem. which is based upon one of the two grammatically possible interpretations of the pointed text, which is itself only an interpretation, is no doubt due to the supposition that the other implications of the verses exclude Ahaz as the subject of **קראת**. The difficulty found here may best be treated in a later connection.

confirmatory element in vs. 14a.<sup>1</sup> This leads us to our next experiment.

11. *Second experiment. Consideration of vs. 14a, the conception and birth of the child.*—The elements in vs. 14a which might conceivably attract attention and give to the sign its confirmatory character could be conjecturally either something peculiar in the nature of the conception and birth of the child, or something peculiar in the personality of the mother of the child, the *‘almah*. In the latter case the personality of the *‘almah* becomes very important. Traditional interpretations have always attempted to discover the confirmatory element in the conception and birth of the child. Since the use of this passage in the First Gospel it has been customary to find in vs. 14a an announcement of a virgin birth. At this late date it seems hardly necessary to enter again into a detailed refutation of this view. If it were Isaiah's intention to announce a virgin birth we would expect him to express this astounding fact in clear and unmistakable language. The very reverse of this is true. In order unambiguously to express the idea of a virgin birth two conditions must be fulfilled: the word *‘almah* must express the idea of virginity, and the verbal adjective *הרה* must clearly indicate that the conception takes place in the present, that the virgin conceives *as a virgin*. Otherwise it might be possible to hold that, though the mother of Immanuel may have been a virgin at the time Isaiah spoke this oracle, she was so no longer at the time of the conception. Neither of these conditions is fulfilled. While the word *‘almah* can undoubtedly be applied, perhaps in the Old Testament is always applied, to one who is a virgin, the word itself does not indicate this fact. Again, while the phrase *הנה הרה* may unquestionably refer to the pregnancy of the mother as already existing, it by no means necessarily does so. Strictly

<sup>1</sup> It is probably because of the desire to avoid the troublesome questions that gather around vs. 14a that the attempt has been so often made in recent years to construe the sign Immanuel as a purely memorial sign. Following an early suggestion of Eichhorn, it is supposed that in the future *any* mother may name her child Immanuel in view of the fact that Judah at the time the name is given has already been or is being delivered. The naming of Ichabod (I Sam. 4:21) and Exod. 3:12 has been urged in support of this view. But we have seen that Exod. 3:12 offers a very dubious analogy to the present passage. The name Ichabod is indeed given as a memorial sign, though the word "sign" is not used in the context, but the context in which that name is given does not require that a confirmatory element should be found in the birth and naming of Ichabod, whereas the context of 7:14 does require this. Commentators have slurred over the problem of Isa. 7:14 at this point in a quite inexcusable way.

construed, the language may equally well or even better suggest that the conception as well as the birth of the child is in the future. The point here is that if the conception or pregnancy as contrasted with the birth were definitely located in the present it would be natural to distinguish between the present pregnancy and the future birth by different verb forms, whereas if both pregnancy and birth are placed in the future the same verb forms can be used for both occurrences. The latter mode of expression is adopted in the present instance. The attempt to find a virgin birth in vs. 14 must accordingly be given up. An allusion to so remarkable an event would have to be expressed in exact and explicit terms if it were to be understood. But this is not the case. Neither lexically nor grammatically, even apart from the requirements of the contexts, can this interpretation be defended.<sup>1</sup> But if we are not to find the confirmatory element in a virgin birth, in what does it exist? It may consist, as has been suggested by others, in the fact that Isaiah prophesied the birth of a son, not of a daughter. But is it limited to this? I doubt it. In order to have any force at all the prophecy of a son's birth would have to connect that birth with *some particular* *ʿalmah*. An indefinite, unidentifiable mother will not meet the conditions of a confirmatory sign at all. At this point, therefore, the personality of the *ʿalmah* enters into the discussion. Who is she?

As Isaiah does not tell us in so many words who the *ʿalmah* is, we are again left to conjecture. But conjecture must keep within the requirements of the context which have been already established. It will be most convenient to proceed by the method of elimination. Five possibilities have been advanced in the history of the interpretation of this passage.

1. The *ʿalmah* is the Virgin Mary (cf. Matt. 1:23 and, following this, the ecclesiastical interpretation). But we have just seen that Isaiah was not thinking in this connection of a virgin birth, and, further, he could not have been thinking of the mother of Jesus for the reason that Immanuel was to be born in the immediate future.

2. The guess (it is nothing more than a guess) has recently been advanced that Isaiah is here alluding to a mythological conception

<sup>1</sup> It would never have occurred to anyone had not the incorrect translation of *ʿalmah* by *παρθένος* in the LXX been unfortunately carried over into Matt. 1:23.

current among the people at that time, and that the *ʿalmah* is the maid mother of the Messiah who was believed by Isaiah to be coming in the immediate future. It will be observed that in principle this interpretation is the same as the ecclesiastical interpretation. It sees in the *ʿalmah* a definite person (hence the article that accompanies *ʿalmah* is the definite article) and it sees in her the mother (probably virgin mother) of the Messiah. It differs from the ecclesiastical interpretation in that it connects the idea of a virgin birth and a Messiah with a popular messianic eschatology current in Isaiah's day and rooted in ancient mythological conceptions, and recognizes that Isaiah expects a fulfilment in the immediate future. Apart from the lack of all proof that there was such a messianic eschatology existing at that time we have seen that the name Immanuel cannot possibly embody such a hope. It is a prophecy of a temporary deliverance which itself was to be the guaranty of ultimate destruction.

3. The favorite view of modern scholars has been that the *ʿalmah* is no definite person at all, but any woman of marriageable years who may happen to have a child in the immediate future (the article is now taken generically). Such a person will be able to name her son Immanuel in view of the deliverance already experienced at the time the name is given. This theory violates one of the main requirements of the context, namely, that the sign should have in it a confirmatory element. By construing the sign as an exclusively memorial sign this theory is able to avoid some of the perplexities of the passage, but it does so at the expense of all exegetical probability. This theory is really due to an attempt, whether consciously or unconsciously, to rationalize the passage and make it more acceptable to the modern viewpoint, in the present instance a historically indefensible attempt.

4. The *ʿalmah* is the prophet's wife. In that case it would not be possible to hold that Ahaz named the child. The vocalized text would have to be followed, according to which the mother names it. But if it is Isaiah's own wife who names it she, and no doubt Isaiah himself, would be included in the "us." It would follow that Immanuel would no longer indicate a superficial expression of religious confidence, and the promise in the name would contain a deeper significance than is found in the explanation. In

other words, the whole course of our investigation thus far would have to be retraced and the conclusions revised. Further, while the term *ʿalmah* does not in itself indicate a virgin, it is impossible to suppose that it could be applied to a woman who had already borne a child, as Isaiah's wife had done (cf. vs. 3). To suppose, in order to meet this objection, that the mother of Shear-jashub had died and that Immanuel was the son of a second marriage is absolutely gratuitous.

5. There is just one other theory left that need be considered. The *ʿalmah* is the wife of Ahaz and, because of the meaning of the word, a young wife or bride who had not yet borne a child. Instead of boxing the compass of exegetical and critical possibilities and returning with Gressmann in principle to the ancient interpretation first defended elaborately by Justin Martyr, we have boxed the compass and returned in principle to the ancient interpretation advocated by his opponent, the Jew Trypho.<sup>1</sup> The theory that the *ʿalmah* is a wife of Ahaz has in its favor the following facts:

a) It answers the *general* demand of the context for a *confirmatory* sign. A confirmatory sign which has to do with the birth of a child

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dialogue with Trypho, chap. 43, end, and chap. 44. Trypho identifies the child with Hezekiah. This was refuted by Jerome on chronological grounds (cf. II Kings 16:2 and 18:2). In later times Jewish scholars held that the child was an otherwise unknown son of one of the other wives of Ahaz. But the chronological objections to the identification of Immanuel with Hezekiah are not so serious as is usually supposed. The question turns on the *age* of Hezekiah at his accession and the year of his accession. If II Kings 16:2 and 18:2 be compared it is obvious that something is the matter. Ahaz, according to these statements, was thirty-six years old at his death, and Hezekiah was at the same time twenty-five. Hezekiah must therefore have been born when his father was only eleven years old and nine years before he came to the throne. This is very doubtful. It has been conjectured that twenty-five is to be cut down to fifteen. In that case Hezekiah would be born just about the time of his father's accession, for his father reigned sixteen, or by predating, fifteen years. But when did Hezekiah himself ascend the throne? The Bible gives two flatly contradictory dates for this. According to II Kings 18:10 he began to reign in 727, according to 18:13 in 714. Neither of these dates is probable. On the other hand, there are three indirect but independent and therefore all the more convincing arguments that he came to the throne in 720. On independent grounds the first year of Ahaz must be placed about 735. His death year and the year of Hezekiah's succession would therefore be in 720. In the death year of Ahaz we have a prophecy from Isaiah 14:28-32 (there is no sound reason for questioning either the title or the substantial genuineness of this prophecy) which can be explained most adequately (with Winckler) out of the situation in 720. Finally, if the regnal years of the Jewish kings be reckoned back from the fall of Jerusalem they will place the first year of Hezekiah in 720. If now he was fifteen instead of twenty-five at his accession he would have been born in 735, or in the same year in which the episode in Isa., chap. 7, is to be placed. The coincidence is certainly striking, but it is admittedly based on the conjectural emendation of twenty-five to fifteen at II Kings 18:2. The difficulty that Hezekiah was not called Immanuel will be considered later.

logically requires that the mother of the child be definite and identifiable. The birth of any son from any mother fails to answer one of the most important conditions of the context. But if the context demands a definite and identifiable woman *she must be well known, for Isaiah does not feel it necessary to define her*. He assumes in this oracle that Ahaz and the court to whom it is addressed will know to what woman he refers. Here again it must be kept in mind that we are dealing with the report of an actual conversation. Those to whom Isaiah spoke must have known to whom he referred. The personality of the *ʿalmah* would therefore be familiar to them (the article must be definite, and not generic, to meet the conditions of the context). If she is not the wife of Isaiah himself, what is more likely than that she belongs to the court? The analogy with 8:1-4 is again suggestive. Isaiah does not deal with *any* children born of *any* mother in 8:1-4, but with *his own* children, and he takes particular care that the setting up of the placard with the enigmatic name upon it should be solemnly attested by witnesses. Isaiah knows what is necessary to impress the popular imagination of his day far better than would a modern critic. He dealt in signs that were verifiable, with real concrete facts that could be attested. Hence the theory that the *ʿalmah* is a well-known personality is demanded by the requirement of a confirmatory sign, and the conjecture that this well-known individual belongs to the court and is probably the wife of Ahaz himself is a conjecture that has every probability in its favor, since it is Ahaz and the court whom Isaiah is addressing, and they must know who she is.

b) It answers the general demand of the context for a *striking* sign. A confirmatory sign must be in some way or other a sign that will immediately arrest the attention. The fact that a son is prophesied, and not a daughter, has a certain element of the wonderful in it. But how much more striking and impressive the prophecy becomes if the mother of the son is the king's own wife.

c) This immediate connection of the mother of Immanuel with Ahaz which so increases the effectiveness of the sign agrees in the third place with the probability that Ahaz is to name the child.

d) Finally the theory that the *ʿalmah* is the wife of Ahaz answers the specific suggestions of the context that the sign should have a

bitterly ironical character. We have seen how the various elements of the passage can only be explained when the irony of it is allowed for. When this is done all the elements thus far considered combine into a satisfactory solution. What more stinging irony can be imagined than that the sign which Ahaz had rejected should be accomplished in his own family, than that the mock piety with which he rejected Isaiah's offer (vs. 12) should be echoed in the name Immanuel which Isaiah says he could give to his own son! But at this point we meet with the one objection of any consequence which can be advanced against this theory. Would Isaiah be likely to leave the possibility of fulfilling this sign in the power of Ahaz? Here there are two distinct occurrences to be kept in mind, the naming of the child and his birth. I do not think it is necessary to take the prophecy of the naming of the child too strictly. When Isaiah says, "*Thou shalt call his name Immanuel,*" all he means is that the king *may* call him by this name. *He is interested, not in the certainty of the naming, but only in the certainty of that for which the name stands.* The absoluteness of the expression is due to the latter consideration rather than to the former. This need not, therefore, be regarded as doing any violence to the language of the text.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the reference to the birth cannot be so interpreted. The argument has driven us to the conclusion that if the sign is to be confirmatory an actual birth must be posited. But if Ahaz is to be the father of the child, is not the objection pertinent? Could he not have prevented the fulfilment of the sign if he felt disposed to do so? Two answers may be made to this question. It is clear from all we know of Ahaz that at this time, at least, he was absolutely indifferent to the warnings of Isaiah. He was bent on following his own devices. There is no reason to suppose that he would have paid any attention to the oracle of the prophet. Isaiah would be to him as the son of the prophet was to the servants of Jehu, "a mad fellow" (II Kings 9:11). He would probably not have allowed Isaiah's words to govern him in his domestic affairs any more than in his political affairs. Therefore, even if the pregnancy of the *ʿalmah* is to be thought of as still future, the objection

<sup>1</sup> The foregoing interpretation of וקראת is that which is practically adopted by those who interpret the sign as a memorial sign and regard the *ʿalmah* as any young woman. It will also meet the objection that if the child really was Hezekiah there is no evidence that he bore the name Immanuel.



to the present interpretation arising out of that fact is by no means so serious as is sometimes supposed. The objection does not allow sufficiently for the character of Ahaz or for his attitude toward Isaiah on the present occasion. But the previous question may also be raised: Is the pregnancy of the *ʿalmah* to be thought of as still future, or may it not be regarded as an already accomplished fact? In the latter case the objection to the theory that the *ʿalmah* is the king's wife vanishes. It would be no longer in the power of Ahaz to prevent the accomplishment of the prophecy even if he were so disposed.

Now it has already been pointed out that the language of vs. 14a, if taken by itself, more naturally expresses the fact that the conception as well as the birth is still in the future. It was argued that if a virgin birth were intended a present pregnancy would have to be assumed, and we would accordingly expect the verb forms to express the distinction between the present pregnancy and the future birth in a manner different from the way they actually do. But if it were *not* Isaiah's purpose to announce so astounding a fact as a virgin birth, which would demand the utmost explicitness of statement, but rather to announce some other event more in line with the ordinary operations of nature, the question may fairly be raised whether such exactness of statement is then necessary, and whether the language is not compatible with the supposition of a present pregnancy. It must be remembered that the Hebrew is largely indifferent to the fine distinctions of tense in our sense of the word "tense." A distinction which would be felt as almost necessary in Greek or Latin the Hebrew might easily ignore. Again, in an oral address such as Isa. 7:14, delivered at a moment of great excitement, precision in the use of tenses might very well be neglected unless some unusual thought such as the virgin birth absolutely depended upon it. There is finally a general consideration which makes decidedly in favor of a present pregnancy. The context very strongly suggests that the fulfilment of the sign is to take place in the immediate future. If the *ʿalmah* were already pregnant, the sign would have to be accomplished at least within the year. If she were not yet pregnant, the time of the fulfilment of the sign is left altogether undefined. This is most unlikely. While, therefore, a strict construction of the phraseology of vs. 14a would undoubtedly point to a

future conception, a looser construction is certainly possible and is distinctly favored by the context. A final question in this connection may be asked. If the *‘almah* was actually pregnant at the time these words were spoken, was this condition in an initial or an advanced stage? Here we must probably leave the realm even of conjecture and simply guess. But if her confinement were in its initial stage the sign would gain very much in its arresting character, so necessary to a confirmatory sign. Presumably the condition of the king's bride was not generally known. The prophet's prediction would therefore be all the more startling and the proof that he was speaking in the name of Jahweh all the more convincing. How Isaiah happened to know this generally unknown fact, whether because of a more intimate acquaintance with the affairs of the court or through revelation, is a question which may arise for the modern mind, but not for Isaiah's contemporaries. If it proved true, they would argue that his knowledge was revealed to him by his God.

Thus far the conclusions arrived at are as follows: (1) The context requires that the passage, vss. 14-17, should be construed as a threat. Verse 17 meets this condition and is exactly the kind of a threat which we should expect. (2) Verse 16*b* is compatible with vs. 17 when construed in irony. As surely as the deliverance from Rezin and Pekah comes true (vs. 16*b*), so surely, because of the unbelief of Ahaz, will the destruction by Assyria come true (vs. 17). (3) But vs. 16*b* is the interpretation of the promise in the name Immanuel (vs. 14). (4) Hence the promise in this name is a restricted promise, concerning only the deliverance from the coalition. (5) Since the fulfilment of this promise is the pledge of subsequent ruin no messianic hope nor any genuine religious confidence can be expressed in the name Immanuel. (6) Hence unbelieving Ahaz is probably the person who names the child, and the name as put into the king's mouth by Isaiah has again an ironical force. (6) But the sign which the prophet offers is to confirm the promise of deliverance, not the threat of destruction. The latter is guaranteed by the fulfilment of the promise of deliverance. The sign is accordingly to be construed as a confirmatory sign, not as a memorial sign. (7) The confirmatory element was found to consist not so much in any marvel attaching to the nature of the birth as in the personality of the mother. The *‘almah* is the wife of

Ahaz, more particularly his young bride, whose pregnancy was generally unknown. The fact that the sign was thus to be accomplished in Ahaz's own family gives an added sting to the irony of it. It is claimed that thus far the argument has been conducted with more attention to the requirements of the literary context and the historical situation and with less resort to pure conjecture than any rival theory that has thus far been advanced. The suggestions of the passage itself have been followed out and no attempt has been made to modernize its meaning. The various elements have been found to combine into a fair solution without unduly forcing any of the words or thoughts. Our first two experiments may therefore be considered to be satisfactory. What remains is admittedly far more problematical.

12. *Third experiment. The meaning of vs. 16a.*—On the supposition that Immanuel was a son of Ahaz the puzzling phrase in vs. 16a may become intelligible. This phrase seems to me to have been altogether misunderstood by the great majority of commentators. They take it as having a purely chronological significance, as marking the age of the child before which the fulfilment of the prophecy is to be effected. But there is no agreement among those who hold this view as to the exact age intended by the phrase. Many hold that it implies a very young child, others that it implies a young man of mature years. It is true that the analogy of 8:3 might suggest that the phrase has to do only with a time limit. But if it is carefully examined this view of it cannot be sustained. Practically all of these scholars agree that the phrase is the exact equivalent of the phrases used elsewhere, "to know good and evil," or "to discern between good and evil," which do seem at times to imply the attainment of a certain age. But this view is not correct, as Bredenkamp long ago recognized. The emphasis is not upon the mere ability to discriminate and choose either in the moral or the physical sphere, that may be supposed to characterize a certain stage of development, but upon the fact of a *correct choice*. The boy will know how to reject the evil and choose the good. The emphasis falls not upon the age of the boy, whether young or old, but upon his *character*. It is difficult not to think that the phrase is chosen in deliberate antithesis to the choice which Ahaz has just made. The king had chosen evil

and rejected the good. If Immanuel is Ahaz's son, we may be able to see why Isaiah, in keeping with the general import of the passage, expresses himself as he does in vs. 16*a*. Again his purpose is ironical. Through irony he points out the tragedy of the situation. The consequences of the king's evil choice are irretrievable. Before the child, by a proper choice, would be able to alter the doom pronounced against his father and his father's land this doom will fall. The possibility that the child, unlike Ahaz, might choose the good cannot change the consequences of the king's fateful act. This contrast between the disastrous choice of the father and the possible correct choice of the son, which would nevertheless be unavailing, heightens the tragedy of the situation. One objection to this view of vs. 16*a* at once occurs. The interpretation implies that the good choice of the child cannot alter the doom, but vs. 16 says that before the child can make this choice *deliverance* will come! Does not vs. 16 express the exact opposite of what the foregoing suggestion would lead us to expect? This is at first sight a serious difficulty. It can only be met by emphasizing once more that the ultimate aim of Isaiah in this passage is to announce the judgment to be accomplished by Assyria in vs. 17. The presence of the promise in vs. 16 can only be accounted for on the supposition that Isaiah is expressing himself with terrible irony and that he really means to make the fulfilment of the promise of deliverance in vs. 16 the guaranty of the threat of destruction in vs. 17. *If this initial promise is once accepted*, then all that has been thus far advanced in the interpretation of vss. 14 and 16*a* follows, if not by stringent, logical necessity, at least naturally and easily. It is because this premise is so absolutely essential to the theory of the passage which has been sketched out that at the outset the attempt was made to establish it securely out of the data furnished by the literary and historical context of this scene.

Having examined in due order the various ingredients in the sign, the significance of the name and the identity of the person who gives it in vs. 14*a*, the significance of the conception and birth and the identity of the *ʿalmah* in vs. 14*a*, and the force of the phrase "to reject the evil and choose the good" in vs. 16*a*, there remains the task of investigating the significance of the child's diet and the relationship of that diet to his rejection of the evil and choice of the good (vs. 15)..

This *fourth experiment* I must postpone to another occasion. It would involve a review of all the main theories of the passage hitherto advanced and would require as much space as has already been devoted to the other experiments. I can only record my conviction that vs. 15 is an ingredient which will not combine either with the other ingredients of the sign or with the great bases furnished by the context in any satisfactory way. Every experiment with vs. 15 ends in failure. The conclusion is therefore inevitable. Verse 15 is an intrusion into the passage. It is probably a gloss which takes advantage of vs. 16*a* and attempts to give to Immanuel a messianic significance. A complete discussion of the Immanuel prophecy would also have to deal with the problems presented by chaps. 8 and 9:1-7. But for these the spaciousness of a monograph is necessary. I am not so foolish as to make the claim that the theory advanced in this article is free of all difficulties and proof against attack, even apart from the difficulties which grow out of vs. 15, but I do venture to hope that it takes into account the conditions of the problem more candidly than is usually done in the discussions with which I am familiar, and that in spite of the incompleteness of the argument something has been accomplished by way of setting up signposts to warn against false paths and to mark out the way of the future investigator more clearly.